9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

342 instance the stranger must not be allowed to leave the house that way lest he take the luck of the house with him. In the [764] Aran Islands it was the custom to carry out the corpse through the back door.

The deal door has not long since replaced, in remote spots, the wickerwork frame, lined with straw, or the hanging straw mat, and I have been told of houses where a creel offered the only protection. There may be only one small window, towards the hearth-end, for the open door provides light. ●[281] A dried sheepskin was a substitute for glass, and I have come across windows where a sheet of glass was sealed with clay without any frame. Where the hole was open, a handful of hay or a wicker shutter closed it at nights. These conditions help us to understand why the window or windows, even now, tend to be restricted to the side sheltered from the prevailing winds.

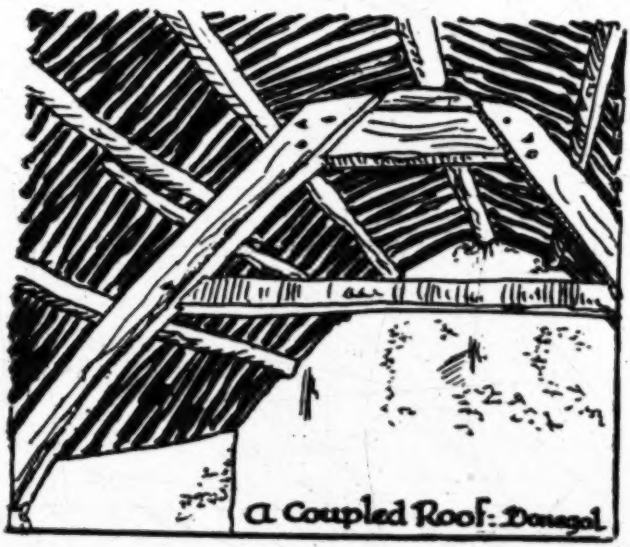

Fig. 20.

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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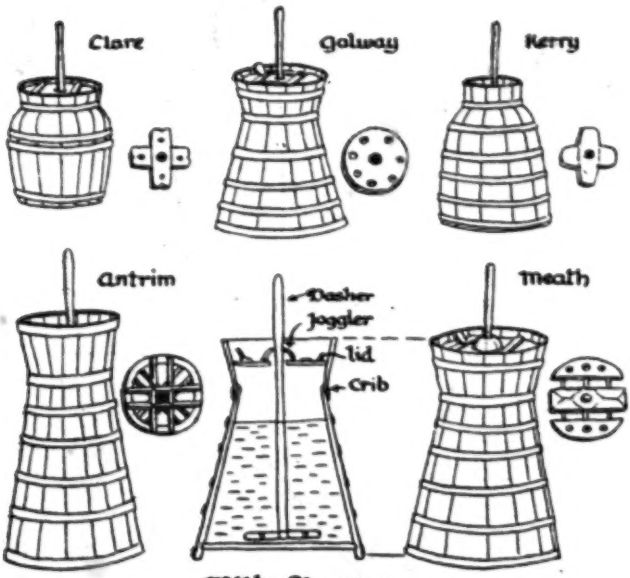

Milk Churns

Fig. 67.

Fig. 68.

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[281]

of these are in regular use: I illustrate a piggin or milking vessel (Fig. 68), a butter tub, and an old-fashioned tub of bog-fir, bound, as were the other stave-vessels before the adoption of iron hoops, with split sally rods, and covered with a stone lid. Two smaller stave-built noggins for holding water, milk or porridge are also shown (Fig. 69), the Tyrone example being of oak with an ash wrapping, the Donegal specimen of bog-fir and sally bands. Passing mention must be made of wooden spoons and the handsomely carved butter stamps (Fig. 70). Wooden dishes, ladles (Fig. 70) skimmers and jogglers (Fig. 67) are made of sycamore and turned on the pole-lathe.

Sieves of various kinds found a use in the dairy as well as in kitchen and barn. Among the exports from Ireland in

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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former centuries animal hides and skins figured prominently, and it is not uncommon in the west to see cured skins of wild and domestic animals used as floor-coverings. No doubt in earlier days skins and furs were worn, but in modern times raw-hide has been employed only for shoes such as the "pampooties" worn by the Aran Islanders. These have the advantage that they do not damage the frail curraghs, just as the Islandman's headgear is the knitted Tam o' Shanter which the wind cannot blow off. A century ago one might have seen a dried sheep-skin serving as a window, or even a cowhide used as a door-hanging. Sheep- and goat-skins still find their uses as back-protectors (Chapter 16), in the making

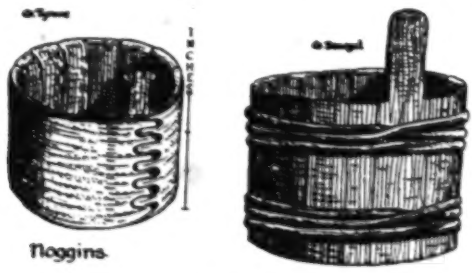

Fig. 69.

of thongs for flails, and especially in providing bottoms for various trays and sieves, the only difference between them being that the sieve-skin is perforated.

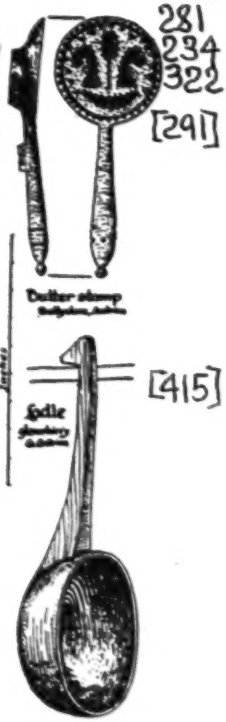

Fig. 70.

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The skin, scraped and dried, is wrapped or sewn on to a rim of ash or bog-fir (Fig. 71), and a good deal of skill is required to stretch it on without a wrinkle. These trays are called wights or wechts in the north-east: the peat wight is for carrying turf to the house and the corn wight for pouring corn into a sack. The winnowing tray sometimes has small perforations to allow the wind to pass through as the corn is shaken on to a cloth. A windy spot was selected for the purpose, and numerous "Shelling Hills" get their name from this operation. The perforations, about one-eighth of an inch

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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281 415 across, are commonly arranged in patterns having, for example, the maker's initials and the date left unpierced. A deeper tray used for carrying corn or for fruit-picking is known as a "dallan." Then there is the meal sieve, which has fine perforations, for sifting the coarse skins (meal seeds) from the oatmeal. Similar to this is the buttermilk sieve with which, 285 415 before the adoption of the hair sieve, the small particles of butter were strained from the buttermilk. A milk-strainer made of birch bark folded into a cone and filled with straw is referred to in a 17th century account quoted by Mr. E. MacLysaght. In Tory, according to Mr. T. Mason, the wight is "composed simply of sheepskin with a twisted straw rope forming the rim."

The corn sieve, for getting out dust and dirt, and the corn riddle (Fig. 71), for separating bits of straw and "hairy

[281]

Fig. 71.

tails," consist of interwoven splits of ash or bog-fir attached to a rim of the same material. The only difference between them is that the mesh of the former is one-eighth of an inch, of the latter perhaps ¼ inch, though it may vary for different kinds of grain. Efficient riddling is a difficult and nowadays rather rare art. I have not come across sieves of rushes or split willow, but it is very likely that they may be found.

243 412 The corn riddle and the winnowing tray lead us back to the thrashing floor in the barn. Here we will probably see a flail hanging on the wall. The sound of the flail is by no means rare in Ireland, for in outlying districts the small farmer has no other means of thrashing. The three parts of the flail are the helve or "hand-stave," a straight stick of any light wood such as ash or larch, the shorter and heavier swingel or beater, called in Ireland the "souple" (generally made of hazel, occasionally of holly or birch) and the flail-joint, hanging or [284] "mid-kipple," which may be a sheep- or goat-skin thong, a

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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HOME-MADE THINGS

The straw cape placed over the bee-skep (Fig. 69) is a humble relation. Straw masks are worn also by Biddy Boys on St. Briget's Eve, and by the Christmas Rhymers. On St. Briget's Eve, too, a small straw doll (Brideóg) was dressed up and carried from door to door in the south-west of Ireland. A charm of plaited straw known as Bratóg Brighde (literally, Briget's Rag) is carried by the fishermen of Tory Island as a protection against storms (Fig. 70, *5*). There was also Briget's Girdle, a two-strand straw rope, a circle with crosses attached, which was passed over the body as a protective charm, by inserting one leg and then pushing the head through on the Saints' Feast Day (Fig. 85).

Before the Irish live-cattle trade developed there had been for some centuries a great export of hides and skins, and if one goes back earlier it becomes clear that these products must have found a multitude of uses about the farm. For a number of purposes where toughness and durability are specially needed animal skin has remained a traditional material, and in old-fashioned mountainy areas the countryman makes a habit of curing the skins of wild and domesticated animals on the principle that 'you never know but what they'll come in useful'. On analogy with the Hebrides, with which Donegal in particular shows close cultural affinities, skin mealbags should have had a place in cottage economy in north Ireland. When grinding corn, a skin was laid on the floor under the quern to catch the meal. Seal skin served many purposes, from plough traces, in Harris, to the covers of curraghs in Donegal. We have descriptions of cured sheepskins serving as windows,[1] and (from St. Kilda) of fowling ropes bound with strips of salted cowhide to prevent them from being cut by the rocks.[2] But it is in the skin tray, the wecht or wight, that one is most likely to see tradition maintained (Fig. 71). The well-scraped skin of sheep, or sometimes of goat, is stitched on to a rim of ash, bog fir or, in the naked islands which have exhausted even their bog timber, a ring of sugan. To secure the skin free of wrinkles is skilled work, and the finished product is not unlike a tambourine: in fact, it closely resembles the Eskimo caribou drum. Irish wrenboys

[1] Lord George Hill, *Gweedore*, 25.
[2] Martin Martin, *The Western Isles*, 315.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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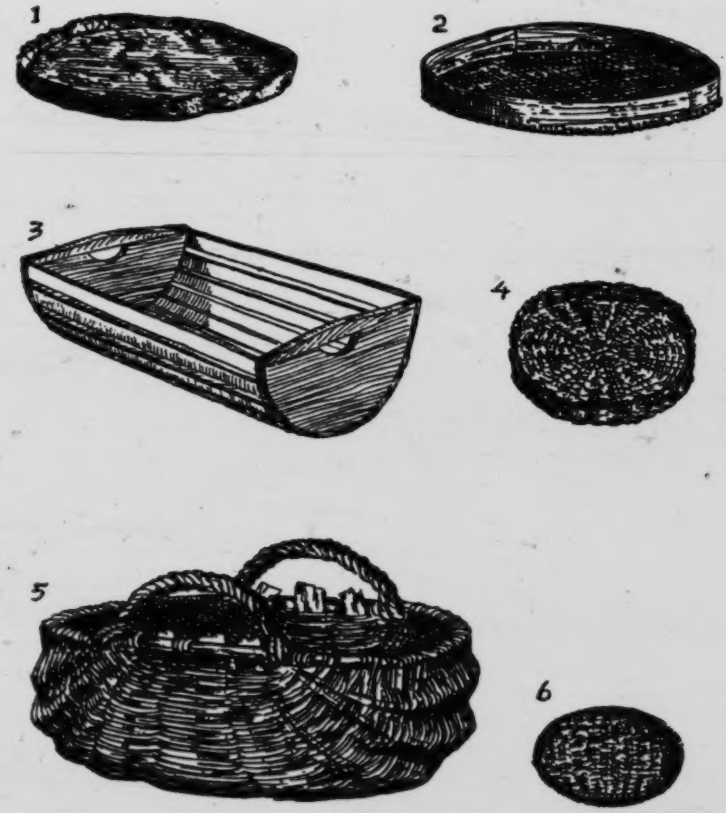

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FIG. 71. Skin-tray, split-ash riddle and potato baskets. Approximate scale 1/9 (No. 5, 1/6). (1) Sheep-skin tray or wight. (2) Split-ash riddle. (3) Potato 'basket'. (4) Potato skib. (5) Potato basket. (6) Potato skib. (All Co. Antrim.)

Irish wren boys

[534] carried a skin tambourine which they beat when hunting the wren on St. Stephen's Day, and one wonders whether the drummers from whom the Orange performers on King William's Day inherit their wild rhythms were trained on ceremonial wights. (There are also sieves, riddles and shallow baskets of split ash or sally, but these, for example the flat round potato skib—a communal self-service plate—should properly be classed as the work of specialists. 212 (Fig. 71).

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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as the work of specialists (Fig. 71). The pampooties of the Aran Islands deserve mention here. Made of calfskin, but formerly of sealskin,[1] these one-piece shoes were once doubtless widely worn and have kept their hold in Aran because of their suitability for wet rocks and frail curraghs. The rivlins of Scotland and the Highland *bròg*an were very similar and I have seen rawhide shoes of the same type from Norway and the Pyrenees. They all have the hair outside and are secured by lacing back and front.

The wight serves both to hold corn, in filling a sack for instance, and to convey peats from the stack to the fireside: perforated it becomes a meal-sieve (boran) for sifting the skins (seeds) from oatmeal, or a buttermilk sieve for taking out the last grains of butter from the churn. The winnowing tray or dallan is a larger version, and it, too, may be perforated to allow the wind to pass through as the corn is shaken out on to a spread cloth. There are, up and down Ireland, many bold windy Shilling Hills where the 'shellings' (husks) were, in past times, separated from the grain in this way (Pl. 7).

This brings us to the flail and its 'hanging' (the mid-kipple, hooden, gad, middling, or tug) which was commonly a thong of cow-, horse-, sheep, or goat-skin, though sometimes of rabbit- or eel-skin or a cord of flax. The flail, the proverbial 'stick-and-a-half', consists of a three to four feet long helve or hand-staff, usually made of ash, and a shorter beater, swingle or souple of hazel or holly. There are two principal methods of 'hanging' the parts together. In one variety, the tie passes through two leather caps lashed over the ends (Fig. 72, 1). This appears to be a variant of the common English flail-hanging, where, however, the cap is made of steamed ash or yew and there is no linking piece. Its distribution in Ireland, down the east coast, points to derivation from England. Modifications, occurring as far west as Donegal (Fig. 72, 1*a*, *b*), have the linking thong passing through a hole made either in the helve or in the beater. Kevin Danaher states that the capped flail is characteristic of central Europe: it is believed to have first appeared in north France in the early Middle Ages.[2] The

[1] O'Flaherty, *H'Ier Connaught*, 59 (footnote).
[2] *J.C.H. and A. Soc.*, 60 (1955), 6–14.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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XVII

BOATS AND FISHING

THE lower reaches of the River Boyne, celebrated among archaeologists as the setting of one of the most remarkable groups of chamber tombs in western Europe, have another claim on our interests as the last refuge of a venerable craft. This is perhaps the only place in Europe where the phrase 'the skin of a boat' preserves its literal meaning. The lath or wicker-work coracle is known on several of the Welsh rivers, but only in the Boyne curragh (Ir. *currach*) is the covering still made of hide. The ox-hides now used are imported: the one I examined during a recent visit to the salmon fisheries near Drogheda had been tanned by a specialist in the dressing of beaver skins. Each hide may outlast several 'baskets' or boat-frames, for these quickly rot with repeated wettings and dryings, and on the average two frames of doubled hazel wands are required each season, which lasts from 12th February to 12th August. A few other Irish rivers kept their curraghs into recent centuries—the curragh was certainly known on the Shannon and the Erne and possibly on the Bann—but on most of the inland waters dug-outs seem to have been traditional, and if we knew more about the two distributions important cultural inferences might be drawn. Dug-outs have been found, however, in nearly every part of the country, including the River Boyne.

The curragh is not likely to survive much longer and its lore should be fully recorded. Netting salmon in fresh water on all Irish rivers has been illegal since 1st January 1948, so that the curragh's last legal refuge is the tidal portion of the Boyne. But it has been long a-dying. I was told that no more would be made after the death of that fine craftsman Michael O'Brien

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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their skin boats and almost certainly reached Iceland before the Norsemen. An account of the legendary voyagings of St. Brendan speaks of the hides of his curragh as dressed with butter. Port-na-Curaich, on the island of Iona, commemorates the landing of another Irish saint, St. Columba, though one hesitates to accept the tradition that the long mound which may be seen there is the place where he buried his curragh so that he could not return to Ireland. The sea-going curraghs were ideal craft for the Irish raiders who plundered west Britain during and after the Roman occupation: light in weight, of shallow draught and capable of flying over the waves. Probably the plank-built longboats of the Vikings drove the curraghs from the Irish Sea, but its descendants are still to be found in the rowing curraghs of the west coast from Donegal to Kerry. The Boyne curragh is a fossilized relic of an earlier form, if indeed it is not, as Hornell thought, a degeneration product.

But besides the rowing curraghs up to twenty-five feet in length there are also, in Donegal, smaller paddling curraghs eight or ten feet long which seem to stand between the oval river baskets and the sharp-pointed rowing curraghs. In an account of the Rosses in the 1750s we read of the funeral processions to the island of Aranmore in Donegal which comprised as many as sixty or eighty curraghs covered with seal skins.[1] We learn from a description of their construction written nearly 100 years later that the frame of sallies and laths, at that time 'skinned with a hide or tarred canvas' was lashed together with cords of horsehair.[2] The same writer tells us that cattle were transported in them by lifting an animal into the curragh on its back, with its legs tied, and carrying the loaded vessel into the water. He gives the following example of 'the reckless daring of these islanders. A man and his wife coming out of the island of Aranmore, in a little boat filled with turf, had a horse standing on top of it; with the roll of the sea, the animal was thrown out, and as they were a long way from land, must have been drowned, had not the man cleverly succeeded in getting him into the boat again!' It seems from what records are available that the hides used for covering the vessels,

[1] A. B., *The Rosses in 1753*, 202.
[2] Lord George Hill, *Gweedore*, 31.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

501 whether seal-skin or the hide of a cow or horse, were untanned. I can add little to the historical account given by Hornell, but
[281] it should be noticed that the paddle curragh, covered with horsehide, was common in Erris, Co. Mayo, around 1850[1] and that, to judge from an entry in a Rathlin Island account book of 1760—'paid for one mare's hide for the boat, 1s. and 6d.'—the paddle curragh was used there also.

501 The long rowing curragh with its high pointed nose is widely distributed on the west coast from Donegal to Kerry,
3% and its seaworthy qualities are known to many from its dramatic participation in such films as *Man of Aran* and *Shark Island*. This vessel too is built bottom upwards, but the frame is pegged, not into the ground but into a strong wooden gunwale frame, single or double, which Hornell believes was borrowed, along with the fixed thwarts which give lateral rigidity, from plank-built boats. Yet the method of pivoting the oar on a single tholepin, originally perhaps a strong projecting rib of the curragh frame, rather than in a rowlock, suggests that the rowing curragh has native forerunners. There are many variations in constructional details from one district to another but nearly all the vessels are now built of laths and all are covered with tarred canvas. An emergency repair is contrived by an operation which, if you are a timid passenger, looks like 'burning your boats': the curragh is inverted, the tar around the hole is set alight and a calico patch stuck on when the tar has run. The curraghs are rowed by two, three or four men, and the largest are said to have a carrying capacity of two tons. In Kerry they are masted to carry a small lug sail. A feature of
[777] many curraghs is a small bottle of holy water, a protection against misfortune, suspended on a string in the bows.

501 The looms of the long narrow oars overlap so that the oarsman pulls cross-handed. A heavy wooded counterweight, the bool, is attached near the loom, and the oar pivots by means of a round hole in the bool on a single wooden peg, the tholepin, driven into the gunwale (Fig. 78). This method of rowing is found on many lake and river boats in Ireland, perhaps es-
[171] pecially in those areas, such as the Shannon and Lough Neagh,

[1] P. Knight, *Erris in the Irish Highlands* (1836), 56. See also *Pococke's Tour* 1752, 64.

 [Text continues on p. 240]

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

pre-Gaelic tongues, and there can be little doubt that the eel fishery is prehistoric in origin. The draft nets in which pollan are caught in the lake—the pollan is a fresh-water herring peculiar to some Irish and Scottish lakes—also display old features. The sections, known as webs, are sewn together with a bone needle into long nets, which are weighted with stone sinkers. The draft-net is widely used in the salmon rivers, as described on the Boyne earlier in this chapter, and references to draft-netting go back to the twelfth century. On some rivers tall towers are erected from which a watcher signals the presence of fish.[1]

We are not here concerned with the commercial offshore fisheries, but something must be said of the inshore fishing because it has been characteristically combined with farming all around the coast. This type of fishing was well suited to the Irish crofter economy, so that the comment frequently made by improving visitors and despairing Government officials was that the Irish would not go out to fish, but waited for the fish to come close inshore. The shore-dwelling farmer is knowledgeable about the ways of fish and knows all 'the signs'. He has been accustomed to keep a net to hand and watch for shoals of different fish at the right seasons. There are watching points on the cliffs overlooking many a small bay, and it was from such vantage points on the south and west coasts that the pilchard 'huers' directed the seine boats to the shoals that visit Ireland intermittently.[2] In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the Irish pilchard fishery grew to large proportions but it has now declined to something like its older local significance. When the industry was capitalized by promoters like Sir William Petty it was the train oil pressed out during the packing of the pilchards for export which found an Irish market. It was used both as a luminant and in the preparation of leather. The seine boats have now turned their attention to herring and mackerel, and Dr. Went has pointed out that the seine is used for catching salmon only in Kenmare Bay, where Petty introduced it for pilchard fishing about the year 1672.

In the Irish Sea the herrings come close inshore in September

[1] A. E. J. Went, *J.R.S.A.I.*, 85 (1955), 22–23, Pl. 3A.
[2] A. E. J. Went, *J.C.H. and A. Soc.*, 51 (1946), 157–57.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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226 types of gear. It used to be said that you should never risk taking a dog into some of the fishing villages on the north coast: [281] their skins were in great demand for making the line floats or 'stookies'. Very probably seal skins were formerly used for this purpose, as among the Eskimo. The sinkers of grooved stones from the beach might well pass for prehistoric implements (Fig. 74). The beautifully made line-baskets of unpeeled [285] willow have the graceful curves that one associates with the work of untouched 'primitives' (Fig. 82). And the division of [462] labour was on a primitive level, for to the womenfolk fell the tedious labour of baiting and preparing the hooks. The long-line fishermen were exceptionally hardy and were regarded with awe and respect by the inshore fishermen-farmers. No doubt the timid and the weakly had been weeded out by continual stress. Their knowledge of the sea and of the fishing [423] marks was a guarded secret, and the best banks were some-[777] times allotted, no doubt to avoid fights, by casting lots. In the Hebrides this was done on Bride's Day. There also, and possibly in Ireland, the banks were held in rotation in a kind of marine rundale.

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

ported on the sea only by thin canvas. Most men are able to make pampooties for themselves, but several islanders specialize in the craft and sell their wares to their fellows and to visitors. Usually cured hides are imported from the mainland, and 40 pairs of pampooties can be fashioned from a whole cowhide. They are cut to shape the foot, have the hair outside, are secured front and back by lacing, and when used daily will last about two months. To be pliable, they must be kept moist, so they are dipped in water when they become dry and hardened; however, because they are worn constantly in wet grass and sand, they seldom lose their softness.

In this chapter, I have considered all of the important means of gaining a livelihood in Inis Beag. Some I have discussed at length, while others I have touched on briefly and will reconsider later; but two thus far not referred to—piloting and recovering objects washed ashore—I would like to take up before ending the chapter. Only one pilot remains in the island, but early in the century men of several families guided vessels through the east sound to ports on the mainland. Then it was customary to place lookouts at the high points of Inis Beag to scan the horizon for masts of approaching ships, and often several canoes would race miles out to sea in order to be first to contact a potential customer. The Terrace villager who still plies the trade seldom contacts likely vessels now, and more often than not his services are refused once he rows to a ship, what with modern charts and navigating instruments. Piloting is still very much alive in the memories of the folk, and one of the popular genres of folklore is the humorous anecdote dealing with real and imagined experiences of pilots. One of these concerns a crew fishing in the east sound which was hailed by the captain of a passing schooner. Although not a pilot, an old member of the crew claimed that he was and climbed aboard, and the captain agreed to hire him after he said that he knew the sound and coastline well. Soon after, the ship struck bottom "with a great bump," and the enraged captain shouted, "I thought you said you knew all the rocks in the sound.", to which the islandman replied in a quiet voice, "I did, and that's one of them." The same old man in another tale earns the job by boxing the compass in Gaelic for the captain; the humor of this story lies in the fact that the captain does not know Irish, and the islandman, who in turn does not know the points of the compass, simply recites terms of reference[2] for kin in a rhythmic manner.

One of the oldest of Inis Beag traditions is the "law of wrack"—the right of islanders to confiscate objects of value which have washed ashore. If a person discovers wrack, he establishes ownership by placing a stone atop it or by carrying it above high water mark, and no one else will claim it. Some islanders wander along the shores at dawn seeking what objects may have washed in during the night, especially timber, and those who habitually engage in this pursuit are known disparagingly as "wrack-boomers"—so poor that they must depend on salvage. During the two world wars, the economy of Inis Beag was bolstered by the immense amount of wreckage which drifted in from torpedoed ships, and the islanders still reminisce about particular visitations of flour, planks, and other

[2] See p. 75 for a definition of terms of reference.